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STANDARDIZATION OF MULTILINGUAL AREAS

Multi-Lingual Areas and Training Courses

Submitted by the United Kingdom

MULTI-LINGUAL AREAS AND TRAINING COURSES

(Prepared by H.A.G. Lewis, United Kingdom)

In a separate paper issued at this session of UNGEGN the concern of United Kingdom experts was expressed at the interpretation by other experts of UN resolutions on official names and exonyms. That concern is strengthened by the fact that the cases quoted are examples of what is imparted to students attending training courses sponsored or supported by the United Nations. Students at those courses have been informed, for example, that the city of Kénitra in Morocco has been re-named Mina Hassan Tani. No such name-change occurred.

It is essential that information imparted to students is verified for its accuracy. It is even more important that resolutions adopted by the conferences are not presented to students in a selective way in order to support a particular viewpoint. Minority names are subject to two over-riding principles. International standardization shall be based on national standardization. National standardization of geographical names is the responsibility of the supreme administering authority. The treatment of names in minority languages is, therefore, the responsibility of that authority.

At the first conference in 1967, a resolution stated that the national authority determine names in each of the official languages and indicate their equality or precedence and "publish these officially acknowledged names in maps and gazetteers". Another recommendation referred to local inhabitants as informants in field collection of names and to the local spoken form and generic term used locally. Yet another recommendation used the expression "with due regard to dialect forms". Those parts of the resolution have been put together in order to draw the conclusion that toponyms should be "represented on the map in the proper regional form". When presented in that way, it would appear that the United Nations insists on regional names having priority over other names, but that is a misrepresentation of the aims of the resolutions. It is a consequence of applying a narrow meaning to the words "local" and the expression "dialect forms".

The national authority alone has the responsibility and the requisite knowledge for the treatment of its own minority names. The resolutions in question must be understood to apply not simply to countries where there are two or three languages but to those in which, perhaps, hundreds of languages are spoken. In such areas a place may have more than one "regional" name. The national authority, however, may not wish to use any of the minority or regional or dialect names. It is the sole arbiter in the matter.

China, Russia, Italy and Nigeria, for example, will determine which name to recognize for the purposes of national standardization. UNGEGN is requested, therefore, to re-iterate its support of this principle.